

We Can't Afford to be Innocent

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Summary: Growing up in Hollow Bastion isn't easy, and neither is protecting Prince Rufus. Once Dilan's protégé in all but name, now the leader of band of teenagers he's turned into guards, Tseng is determined to do the best he can with what he has. But the Organization draws ever nearer, and it isn't Tseng they're after...

We Can't Afford to be Innocent

Rated T for language more than anything else.

This fic takes place roughly one year prior to Kingdom Hearts 1.

The Turks have been de-aged to better fit in the Kingdom Hearts universe, so here are the ages as of this fic:

Tseng - 18

>Rude - 16
Reno - 15

>Rufus - 14
Elena - 13 (same age as Sora)

* * *

><p>To say the sudden attack caught the young Turks by surprise would be doing them a disservice â€” the remaining trio and Rufus had all expected a second attack shortly after the one that had cost them Tseng.<p>

However, the Organization clearly believed in quality over quantity, and so the second wave â€” a single man, just like the other attacks â€” overwhelmed them completely.

They had all been careful, extremely so. But not, it seemed, careful enough.

Reno was the first to respond the distinctive sound of a black portal opening. Before Rude and Elena were halfway to their feet, the lanky redhead was in motion, lunging for the attack with his pipe in his

left hand and a spell on his lipsâ€”

Only to be caught on a backhand swing of the man's enormous, strangely-shaped weapon.

Elena was positive she heard something in Reno's ribcage snap before he was thrown several _yards_ away.

There was a moment's startled silence, during which the Organization man shouldered his weapon, and then Rufus started cursing steadily.

"Elena."

She didn't take her eyes from the stranger, but inclined her head to show Rude she was listening.

"Take Rufus and go."

Amber eyes flew wide, though Tseng's training meant she didn't look at Rude. "Butâ€”"

"_Now_, Elena!"

She'd never heard Rude raise his voice before. But it had the desired effect; she ran to Rufus, grabbed the prince's wrist, and kept running. She was certain the only reason Rufus didn't fight her was the shock of seeing Reno so quickly downed.

She looked back once over her shoulder to see Rude in a low ready stance, waiting for the huge Organization man to come to him.

He doesn't plan to win, she realised with a fresh surge of terror. Rude, big for his age and strong for his size, able to punch a Shadow into motes of darkness, intended to _stall_ the Nobody for as long as he could.

She choked back the sob that rose in her throat and kept running.

All too soon â€” sooner than Rude liked, she was certain â€” she heard a yell of pain that was suddenly cut off.

Fuck.

She let go of Rufus' wrist and pushed him in front of her. "Keep going!" she ordered. "We're almost to the Castle â€” if you can get insideâ€”!"

The prince opened his mouth like he was going to object, but closed it slowly. His eyes were hard, as hard as they'd been when the deadly pink-haired man had taken Tseng. "Stall him," he said, and she'd never heard him give an absolute order like that one.

Luckily, that was her plan all along.

But Rufus surely knew thatâ€”|?

She cast a second glance at him, but he was already sprinting for the Castle. He knew she was second only to Tseng when it came to reading

him.

She offered up a quick prayer that he'd make it out safely and then started running again, hoping to find a level playing field she could transform.

The problem with fighting the Organization was that they had no need to run.

No sooner had she stopped running than the air tore again, and the stranger stepped out of another portal " far too close to her.

With a shriek she would never, ever admit to, Elena leapt away from the Nobody, just barely avoiding his grab at her jacket. Frantic, she aimed the stick that served her for a wand at the ground and yelled, "***Freeze**!"

Her spell struck and immediately began to spread, creating an inch-thick layer of ice. She raised her wand, ready to cast again to use the kickback to create even more distance between them, but the Nobody"

It would have been less frightening if he had smirked, or laughed, or even mocked her.

Instead, he simply raised his weapon, then smashed it into the ground with a yell.

The impact shook her feet on the ice, making her slip for the first time in years"

And she realised in terror that her ice had been shattered, the ground torn to pieces, raised and broken enough that her greatest defence would do her no good at all. Worse, none of the boulders that had shaken free were big enough to use for any sort of cover, and the ground was so rough now she would trip if she didn't watch her step.

She lifted her eyes from the ground to see the Nobody reaching for her.

She shrieked again, stumbling backwards and tripping, but this time her shriek held a word. "***Freeze**!"

The ice spell hit him in the face, making him pause long enough for her to scramble past him on all fours, abandoning dignity for a chance to get out of his insanely long reach.

By the time she was on her feet and facing him again, he regarded her like he knew something she didn't, and that scared her too.

But she had to stall. She had to keep him occupied long enough for Rufus to escape. She wasn't Rude, she didn't have a prayer to hurt him close up. If she could just keep her distance"

He swung his weapon into the ground again, but this time the ground beneath her feet bucked, convulsed; she was suddenly flying, soaring high, falling"

Impact drove the air from her lungs even as her entire body throbbed. Somehow, she still held her stick-wand, fist clenched so tight around it her knuckles ached.

She tried to breathe, failed; tried again and began to cough. She tried to struggle to her feet, but then the ground quivered and _bucked_ againâ€”

As she flew over the pond where Tseng had first found her, she caught sight of the Nobody shouldering his weapon. Taking in as much air as she could, she pointed over his head and shrieked, "***Gather**!"

She had an instant's smug pleasure at seeing the huge weapon yanked from his grasp before she slammed belly first into the water.

Reflexively she tried to gasp, and water poured in her mouth and nose. Panic set in, and Elena struggled, trying to get her feet beneath her, to touch the bottom of the pond and push _up_, but she was still dazed from hitting the water andâ€”

A large hand grabbed her by the ankle, yanking her clear.

She dangled helplessly from the Nobody's fist, coughing and gasping for breath.

* * *

><p>Lexaeus had assumed it was lingering sentimentality â€” or the memory thereof â€” that led Xaldin to return empty-handed every time he was sent out to bring Rufus and Tseng in.<p>

Demyx had been sent out twice, and returned alone each time â€” the second time with a rather impressive bruise on his jaw.

And then Marluxia was sent out and returned â€” with a half-dead, semi-conscious, and still-struggling Tseng.

Only when Lexaeus himself volunteered â€” they still had need of Rufus, or so Zexion said â€” did he learn what Xaldin, Demyx, and Marluxia had kept to themselves:

Somehow, Tseng had acquired allies and taught them to guard Rufus as he did.

Moreover, with their leader gone, they had been _expecting_ another attempt to claim Rufus.

Their preparation did them no good. In the end, no matter how brave or tenacious they were, they were only children. The lanky boy with Axel's face had been batted aside without a second thought; the big one â€” big for the child he was, but still small compared to Lexaeus â€” hadn't lasted much longer. Both boy and Nobody had known he was nothing more than a roadblock, a sacrifice to buy the little girl â€” Elena, the big one had called her â€” and Rufus time to escape.

It was a pointless exercise.

By the time he dispatched the boy, the two blonds were still in sight â€” alike enough at a distance that Lexaeus wondered if Tseng had

used the little girl as a body double.

It was a simple matter to open a portal to where she had just ordered Rufus away. He reached for her, but she spied him andâ€”

He knew that scream.

The sound was an octave or two higher, to be sure, but Vexen's shriek of surprise had just emerged from the girl's lips and â€” yes, her hair _was_ the same cornsilk colour as Vexen's.

The surprise paused him only briefly, but it was enough for her to scurry out of his arm's reach.

After that scream, he wasn't at all surprised when she shouted the command for an ice spell. That she had cast her spell on the ground, however, _did_ surprise him.

And then ice raced across the level ground, and he realised just what she had done.

And had she been fighting one of the others â€” Marluxia, Demyx, or Xaldin, say â€” it would certainly have given her an advantage.

Still, he had to give Elena points for creative thinking.

As she raised her wand, he heaved Skysplitter high, and then slammed it into the ground. Shockwaves raced from the weapon, cracking the earth beneath her ice and breaking apart the smooth playing field she'd created for herself.

She slipped and landed on her rear, staring down as though the ground itself had betrayed her â€” and when she looked up to see him reaching for her again, her honey-coloured eyes were filled with fear.

But Elena was more than just a frightened child; she had been trained, and she had been trained by _Dilan's protÃ©gÃ©_, so even as she screamed she cast a spell, and at such close range he couldn't dodge a midlevel ice spell to the face.

He heard her scramble past him, and by the time he could see clearly she was out of reach again, on her feet and shaking.

She was Vexen's, somehow, or he would eat his weapon.

Bringing her in alive was now the only option open to him.

With a grunt of effort, he slammed Skysplitter into the ground again, focusing his magic differently this time. A pillar erupted beneath her feet, launching her into the air. He watched her try to right herself, instinct or reflex, but she landed on her stomach and lay still for a moment, stunned.

He didn't give her any time to recover; he was already swinging Skysplitter a third time when she started coughing. The second pillar was angled to launch the girl over a pond. However, Lexaeus had underestimated her: even as she began to tumble, she aimed her wand at him and yelled, "***Gather!***"

He was simply too big for the Magnet spell to do more than pull on him, but his weapon weighed far less than he did; the instant before Elena hit the water belly-first, Skysplitter was yanked from his grasp. He let it go; the smack Elena's body had made as it hit the water was loud enough that he knew the breath had been driven from her a second time. He wanted her alive.

She was struggling weakly in the water as he reached into the pond, grasping her firmly by the ankle and hauling her out one-handed. Even drenched in water, she didn't weigh much more than Skysplitter, he noted.

She coughed and gasped, water streaming from her clothes and hair as he righted her. She grasped his arm weakly to keep herself from falling, coughing helplessly as her body reacted to the dunking.

Keeping a firm grasp on her right arm " she was still holding her wand " he took her chin in his free hand and tilted her head up, leaning close so he could study her face while she was still dazed. Her face was rounder than Vexen's, the cheekbones not quite as pronounced, but the forehead, the hair, the chin, even the shape of her eyes " those were features she shared with the Chilly Academic.

Yes, she was certainly Even's child.

Her eyes were too close to gold for his liking.

Sudden clarity snapped into those eyes, and, faster than Lexaeus could release her, she jerked her head back and down and sank her teeth into his gloved hand.

Bolts of energy slammed into the ground at his feet, and he leapt back, snatching Elena up under his arm. He had no time to think, only react as more energy bolts streamed for him from the Castle.

He didn't have Rufus, but he had one of his guardians, and the other two were incapacitated. It would have to do. He crafted a portal back to Never Was, avoiding even more bolts as he plunged in with his captive under his arm.

As the portal closed behind him, he thought he heard an enraged, pained scream.

* * *

><p>Rufus ran as fast as his still-growing legs could take him. He would not lose Elena to Aeheus! Bad enough the traitors had taken Tseng because of him" |

The pounding of his feet echoed through the castle's empty corridors as memory carried him to Braig's room, and to the arrowguns still tucked away into the deepest recesses of the closet. Once, they had been too big for Rufus.

No longer.

He grabbed one and ran to the window, reaching it in time to see a

small, pale figure go flying. A glance at the grass surrounding Elena's pond told him all he needed to know: Aelean's control of earth had grown exponentially, and he'd negated Elena's advantage over most of her opponents.

She hit the water with a _smack_ that made Rufus flinch in sympathy, even as he frantically tried to remember if Elena knew how to swimâ€œ"

But Aelean, it seemed, wanted Elena alive.

He reached into the pond with a speed that belied his great size, drawing the sputtering and coughing girl from the water. He righted her in an instant, grabbing her chin to study her face, and Rufus hissed. _He_ knew what Aelean was looking for.

He raised Braig's gun, saw Elena bite Aelean's hand, aimed for the giant's feet andâ€œ"

fired

Rufus was only prepared for the gun's kickback due to constant, secret practise. As it was, it took him a split-second to prepare his next volleyâ€œ" a split-second too long.

Even as he fired again, and again, Aelean tore open a portal in empty air and strode through with Elena under his arm.

The Organization had taken his guard.

The Organization had taken his sister.

Rufus screamed, his rage, pain, and fear all contributing to an anguished sound that would not have been out of place on the stage.

Hatred pounded in his heart as his feet pounded through the castle, retracing his path so he could check on Rude and Reno. He didn't consciously remember deciding to move, but it was just as well. If he lost them, tooâ€œ|

But no, Rude was still breathing. He lay flat on his back, face turned to the inappropriately blue sky, a pillar of earth testament to the method of the boy's defeat.

Rufus crashed to his knees beside Rude, forcing his magic through the arrowgun he still held. "***Heal**!"

A glowing lotus blossomed above his fallen comrade, and magic showered down on them both. After a few moments, Rude opened his eyes, blinked three times, and sat up with no ill effects. He didn't speak, but a question was in his eyes as he turned to Rufus.

Rufus looked away, using the excuse of finding an Ether. "He took Elena," he admitted, his voice harsh as he popped the blue cube in his mouth. Unfortunately, Ethers did not crunch satisfactorily â€œ" it was like weirdly-flavoured gelatin. He shuddered as he swallowed.

Rude said nothing still, but there was a determination in his face

that gave Rufus hope.

His magic restored, Rufus bounced to his feet and lead Rude to where Reno lay groaning. Another Curaga command, and both Rude and Rufus flinched at the audible snapping that came with Reno's ribs realigning before they healed.

Unlike Rude, Reno started swearing viciously.

Rufus waited until the other boy started to repeat himself, then overrode his words with an order. "Both of you, get whatever you need. We're getting Tseng and Elena back."

Reno shut up, his eyes glittering; Rude nodded once.

Good.

* * *

><p>Many thanks to Ferret, aka taciturn-stalwart on Tumblr, for acting as my writing-beta when I threw paragraphs at her randomly, as well as offering suggestions for how Lexaeus would react to certain things - as well as encouraging a certain relationship.<p>

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End
file.